Portrayal of the African Woman in *Half Of A Yellow Sun*

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**ABSTRACT**

As a result of being disregarded in the patriarchal African society, African women have faced the need to negotiate their identity through various platforms, and literature is one of them. This paper examines how Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in *Half Of A Yellow Sun*, articulates the place of women characters in the Nigerian society. This novel is set in the colonial and postcolonial era: before, during and after the Biafran War in Nigeria, that took place between 1967 and 1970. Nigerian women in the novel face numerous challenges as they attempt to establish their place in the society.

**Keywords:** Portrayal, Construction; African Woman; Half Of A Yellow Sun; Biafran War; Nigeria.

**INTRODUCTION**

The voices of African women have rarely been listened to, contrary to the noises of men which have ‘drowned us out in every sphere of life, including the arts. Yet women too are artists, and are endowed with a special sensitivity and compassion, necessary to creativity’ owing to ‘the two major, irreversible, though accidental facts of their lives – being born an African and a woman’ (James, 1990). It has been argued that unless something is done urgently to save it, the woman’s world will be destroyed. The opinions of women should be included in planning for the remedies for a better Africa, free from colonialism, slavery, failure and post-independence disillusionment. James states that ‘[i]n the early 1960’s, we [women] denounced colonialism; today, we need to speak out, to join together across the continents to save ourselves, and to begin to prepare a viable future for our children. This is the only way we can arrest the cycle of suffering, poverty and oppression that is the lot of the majority of our people’. In addition, she says, ‘A nation’s development can be judged by its treatment of women’ (1990, 3-6). In the literary world, which has also been dominated by men, female authors of African literature have struggled to gain audience over the years. They are increasingly airing their concerns as women, and disproving the misconceptions created by some male writers about them. Many female writers present versions of a woman who longs to be fulfilled in an unfair system that perceives women as “appendages” to men. A few of these writers have won awards, including Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Yvonne Vera and Marjorie Macgoye I will use Adichie’s award winning novel *Half Of A Yellow Sun* to bring out the literary construction of the Nigerian woman, and by extension the African woman in the colonial and postcolonial era in Nigeria. Literature enlarges the perception of a culture by a reader through expanding their understanding of the projected world and conveying a distinct image of the people that comprise the setting in the literary work (Gichari, 2006). Mugo, as cited by Gichari, concurs with Gallagher and Lundin’s note that ‘it is a widely accepted fact that works of art including literature reflect the social structures of the societies from which they emanate. Literature and creative art in general thus helps us to define specific cultural and social heritages’ (2006, 5-6). Hence, both in the act of writing and on the choice of what and how to write, female authors can help in constructing role models and/or debunking male myths about women.

**DISCUSSION**

The Biafran War

*Half Of A Yellow Sun* is a love story based on the Biafran War that took place between 1967 and 1970 in Nigeria. It is important therefore to mention the historical aspect of the causes of the war and the political leaders involved in order to understand and relate with the context of the novel. Adichie uses not only the real names of the military leaders in her novel, for instance Gowon-the leader of
In 1914, the British colonial powers amalgamated Northern Nigeria and Southern Nigeria into the Nigerian State: ‘In 1906, the Colony and Protectorate of Lagos and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria were merged under a single administration called the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria headed by a governor... The provinces consisted of districts under district commissioners. In 1914, the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria was amalgamated with the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, and thus emerged the Nigerian state’ (Oduwobi, 2011). The Northern region was associated with the Hausa-Fulani, the Southwest region associated with the Yoruba and the Southeast region associated with the Igbo. This amalgamation favoured the British colonial masters but worked against the local people, as they lacked: similar cultures; common citizenship with equal rights and privileges; common laws and a common judicial system; equal rights of all citizens before law; rights to acquire property and make a living anywhere in the country; equal rights to employment anywhere in the country and equal rights to protection of life and poverty, but ‘[while the people of the South made strenuous efforts at Nigerian unity, the people of the North did everything to stultify, indeed kill, anything that would foster it]’ (Ojukwu, 1969).

Overpopulation, infertile soils and shortage of work resulted to the Igbo and other Easterners’ migration to Northern Nigeria. Nigeria finally got its independence from the British colonizers in October 1, 1960, hence became a republic. ‘Not unexpectedly, the five years immediately after that date were marked by successive crises; notably the Tiv Riots of 1960-66, the Western Nigeria Emergency of 1962, the National Census Controversy of 1962-63, the Federal Election Crisis of 1964-65, and the Western Election Crisis of 1965-66’ (Ojukwu, 1969).

The Northerners allocated themselves the top posts, leaving the Igbo and other communities with minimal positions, as Ojukwu states: ‘The existing Independence Constitution gave Northern Nigeria a built-in 50 percent representation in the federal Parliament, an arrangement which assured the region permanent control of the federal government. The New statesman of London aptly described the Northern Nigerian Head of federal government as “Prime Minister in apparent perpetuity”. He goes on to explain that the crisis experienced in Nigeria was impossible to resolve, partly owing to “[a] great number of the politicians and others in public life [who] were known to be corrupt, ostentatious and selfish. Bribery and nepotism were rife....To win power or to keep themselves in power, public men had sown unhealthy rivalry, suspicion, and mistrust among the various communities of the country. Thus the unabashed rigging of the Western election of October 1965 came to be the last straw’ (1969, 299).

In a revolt against oppression and injustice, young army officers and military men, under the leadership of Major General J. T. U. Aguiyi-Ironsi, decided to act, ‘[f]rom the available information, their aims were threefold: to put an end to the sufferings of Nigerian citizens in Tiv land and Western Nigeria, to dethrone corrupt and dishonest politicians, and to restore public faith at home and retrieve Nigeria’s reputation abroad’ (Ojukwu 299), hence the first military coup in January 1966, commonly referred to as the ‘Igbo coup’ due to the large number of Igbo soldiers involved. A group of army officers killed the Prime Minister, took over the Government and promoted the Igbos as advisors to the new Central Government. Adichie captures this coup in the conversation between Professor Ezeka, Odenigbo...
The act of secession culminated into a civil war between Biafra and Nigeria that began in June, 1967 and lasted three years. All of Biafra’s links to the outside world were blocked by the federal troops, which received support from Britain and Russia, resulting to shortage of food, thus the death of millions of Biafrans (a majority being women and children) out of starvation and diseases like Kwashiorkor. Pregnant women were also raped and killed, as declared by William Norris (Reporter, Sunday Times), cited by Ojukwu:

I have seen things in Biafra this week which no man should have to see. Sights to scorch the mind and sicken the conscience. I have seen children roasted alive, young girls torn into two by shrapnel, pregnant women eviscerated, and old men blown to fragments. I have seen these things and I have seen their cause: high-flying Russian Ilyushin jets operated by Federal Nigeria, dropping their bombs on civilian centers throughout Biafra (1969, 319).

In spite of the hunger, lack of powerful weapons, scarcity of soldiers, impromptu air raids and inadequate communication, Biafra maintained its resistance to Gowon’s efforts (whose name had been turned into an acronym for ‘Go On With One Nigeria’) for three years, for as stated by Ojukwu, ‘Biafra [was] fighting against imperialism and all the forces of neocolonialism … for the true independence… to show the world that the African can have a will of his own which cannot be destroyed by even the awful might of imperialism and neocolonialism, which to this day are bent to enslave and subjugate Africa’ (358). In 1970, General Ojukwu fled Biafra on the pretext of searching for peace, leading to the surrender of Biafra to Nigeria on January 15, 1970. Adichie states:

On the radio, His Excellency announced that he was going abroad to search for peace.

In accord with my own frequent affirmations that I would personally go anywhere to secure peace and security for my people, I am now travelling out of Biafra to explore...(2006, 509).

The Place Of The Woman In Postcolonial Nigeria, Before The Biafran War As Depicted In Adichie’s Half Of A Yellow Sun

After the British colonizers left Nigeria, its rule was taken over by the Nigerians themselves. Most of the rulers and politicians in Half Of A Yellow Sun are male. This also applies to the successful businessmen. Olanna’s father is a rich politician and businessman who hosts high-level dignitaries in his home. The businessmen who want to give him tenders expect sexual favours from his beautiful
daughter, Olanna. He does not discourage this, but rather attempts to convince his daughter to prostitute herself.

Chief Okonji, another man, is a wealthy cabinet minister who wants to contract Olanna’s father in exchange for Olanna. Kainene asks her twin, Olanna, “‘Daddy literally pulled me away from the veranda so we could leave you alone with the good cabinet minister.’... ‘Will he give Daddy the contract then?’... ‘The other bidders probably don’t have a beautiful daughter.’... ‘The benefit of being the ugly daughter is that nobody uses you as sex bait’” (Adichie, 2006). This made the beautiful Nigerian woman an ‘object’ for sale and an agent of sex for commercial purposes. Olanna’s parents disliked Odenigbo, her fiancé who was a revolutionary lecturer at Nsukka because as they said, he had ‘nothing’ to show for himself except books and “hotheadedness”. ‘The look in her parents’ eyes was grudging respect, Olanna could tell, but it did not stop them from telling her that Odenigbo was crazy and wrong for her, one of those hotheaded university people who talked and talked until everybody had a headache and nobody understood what had been said’ (Adichie, 2006). This is an instance of public patriarchy under ‘neo-patriarchy’, which, as Walby, cited

Private patriarchy is based on the relative exclusion of women from arenas of social life other than the household and the appropriation of their services by individual patriarchs within the confines of the home. Public patriarchy is based on employment and the state; women no longer excluded from the public arena but subordinated within it. More collective forms of appropriation of their services supersede the individual mode of private patriarchy...the twentieth century has witnessed a major shift from private to public patriarchy (1993, 377).

Olanna and Kainene were well schooled. Each of them had a Bachelors and a Masters degree from Universities in the United Kingdom. Their father, with their mother’s approval, wanted Olanna to marry from a rich family to secure their wealth. However, much as Olanna rejected their requests, they kept getting her more rich men, ‘...she refused to marry Igwue Okagbue’s son, and later, Chief Okaro’s son’ (Adichie, 2006). Kainene asks her, “‘So will you be spreading your legs for that elephant in exchange for Daddy's contract?’”, with reference to Chief Okonji, whom Olanna had rejected too. As much as she was well educated and enlightened, her father still wanted to impose a man on her, by displaying her to the public for the men to see and have her in exchange for money and tenders, hence Public Patriarchy. Olanna’s constant rejection of these men and sticking to Odenigbo, a university lecturer with little wealth, brings out the fight for the right of women to choose their marriage partners. She stayed firm to her decision and married Odenigbo eventually, a sign of forthcoming victory for the Nigerian woman in patriarchal Nigeria who chooses to find a marriage partner for herself, despite opposition from her parents.

The woman in the postcolonial Nigerian society was expected to be a mother once she started living with a man, whether legally or traditionally married. A child was what identified a real woman from a ‘spoilt’ one, and lack of children was perceived as a sin. Mama, (Odenigbo’s mother) was furious at Olanna because she had not given birth since she started living with Odenigbo, even though they were not yet married. She called her a witch, and shouted at her: “‘Please go back and tell those who sent you that you did not find my son. Tell your fellow witches that you did not see him.’... ‘Did you hear me? Tell them that nobody’s medicine will work on my son. He will not marry an abnormal woman, unless you kill me first. Over my dead body!’” (Adichie, 2006). This mentality left barren women without an identity in the society. Even though both Odenigbo and Olanna longed to have a child of their own, her barrenness was an obstacle. Adichie gives explicit descriptions of how Olanna and Odenigbo had passionate, unprotected sex, and even talked about having a ‘baby girl’ who would be a replica of Olanna. Unfortunately, her mother in law, a traditionalist, did not accept Olanna as she was, and opted to go for black magic to separate her son from Olanna.

Education was considered as a male’s dominion. A woman, in postcolonial Nigeria was not supposed to go to the University. The older women perceived highly schooled girls as spoilt. Mama, referring to Olanna says: “‘...And on top of it, her parents sent her to university. Why? Too much schooling ruins a woman; everyone knows that. It gives a woman a big head and she will start to insult her husband. What kind of wife will that be?’... “These girls that go to university follow men around until their bodies are useless. Nobody knows if she can have children. Do you know? Does anyone know?”’ (Adichie, 2006). The older generation of women in patriarchal Nigeria was made to believe that a woman should never be at the same level as a man, rather, she should always stoop low and accept everything a man said, whether wrong or right. This was not the case with highly schooled girls who were well informed of their rights and capabilities in the society. By breaking these boundaries and studying to higher levels like men, the women of the older generation branded them ‘ruined’. They preferred their sons to marry unschooled girls who would be submissive. Mama therefore brought a young girl, Amala, from the village, and used charms to make Odenigbo have unprotected sex with her, resulting to pregnancy. Mama says “I do not mind where the woman my son will marry comes from. I am not like those mothers who want to find wives for their sons only from their own hamlet. But I do not want a Wawa woman, and none of those Ibo women, of course; their dialects are so strange I wonder who told them we are all the same Igbo people’’
As much as women in patriarchal postcolonial Nigeria were identified by their ability to give birth, bearing a boy child was considered more significant than bearing a girl child. A woman with a son was more respected than a woman with a daughter. Anulika, Ugwu’s younger sister, who was just starting to develop breasts, had already been taught about the value of bearing a boy when she got married. She tells Ugwu: “I want to have a baby boy first, because it will place my feet firmly in Onyeka’s house” (Adichie, 2006). Amala, who was pregnant for Odenigbo bore a girl child and rejection followed. Both Amala and Odenigbo’s mother did not want to keep the child. After a long discussion with his mother, Odenigbo told Olanna that Mama did not want to keep the baby because “She wanted a baby boy” (Adichie, 2006). Mama therefore resorted to have the baby taken to Amala’s people but Olanna decided that she and Odenigbo would keep the baby and raise her on their own. They would tell her the truth about her real mother when she grew of age. By making Amala give birth to a girl child, contrary to Mama’s expectations, Adichie, in my view attempts to portray the fact that girls do not choose to be born as girls, therefore they should be treated with respect and love, in equal measure just like the boy child is treated in the patriarchal African society.

With regard to the valuability of the boy child in patriarchal Africa, Adichie expresses the value of the girl child in this same society by making the two major characters, Olanna and Kainene, females and twins. To add on this, they are the only children to their wealthy parents. Kainene’s father says “Kainene is not just like a son, she is like two” (Adichie, 2006). His businesses in the East, his factories and new oil interests would be managed by Kainene, who despite being a woman, was very capable of managing her father’s businesses efficiently. In fact, Chief Okonji says, “Whoever said you lost out by having twin daughters is a liar” (Adichie, 2006). These two girls would have been slain at birth, as the traditional Nigerian culture demanded of newly born twins, who were viewed as ‘bad omens’ to the society. However, Adichie by assigning them a bourgeois family, makes them successful, well-school, intelligent and gives them the best life a child would have. This breaks the traditions of patriarchal Nigeria, and elevates the Nigerian girl child to the same level as the Nigerian boy child in postcolonial Nigeria.

The Place Of The Woman In Postcolonial Nigeria, During The Biafran War As Depicted In Adichie’s Half Of A Yellow Sun.

The Woman as a Sexual Object

During the Biafran war, girls and women, who were also referred to as ‘food’ (Adichie, 458) were raped both by the white mercenaries and the Biafrans themselves. Ugwu was forced to participate in the gang rape of a young bartender. As much as he did not like it, he would also not want to be seen as or called a ‘coward’ by the rest of his crew. Participating in the raping was what would justify his manhood:

On the floor, the girl was still. Ugwu pulled his trousers down, surprised at the swiftness of his erection. She was dry and tense when he entered her. He did not look at her face, or at the man pinning her down, or anything at all as he moved quickly and felt his own climax, the rush of fluids to the tips of himself: a self-loathing release. He zipped up his trousers while some soldiers clapped. Finally, he looked at the girl. She stared back at him with a calm hate (Adichie, 2006: 458).

This kind of rape is unique, and ‘…depicted both as an extension of the sexuality of young boys-they chose, after all, to have sex with a young girl, a girl whom they might have found attractive under any other circumstances- and rape is depicted as a bonding male exercise in the practise of war’ (Norridge, 2012). Ugwu, whose nickname was ‘Target Destroyer’, joined the army to restore peace and freedom in Biafra, however, he had destroyed his own target and with the other soldiers, and successfully acquired hatred from their Biafran female rape victims. Such actions by the soldiers of Biafra were very ironical.

Women were sexually exploited by the men in power, then dumped, and left on their own despite the risk of pregnancy or contraction of sexually transmitted diseases, at a time when they needed utmost care and protection. The commander of the Biafran army, a white-man mercenary, raped young, defenseless girls at his own pleasure. Okeoma says “He throws girls on their backs in the open where the men can see him and does them, all the time holding his bag of money in one hand”
As the whole Biafran army relied on his leadership, this man used his authority to sexually abuse the young girls publicly (confident that none would stop him, as it was said that he even threatened His Excellency) causing embarrassment to the girls whose vulnerable nakedness would be exposed to all the soldiers present.

The needy girls in refugee camps were not spared either. Father Marcel, a religious leader in charge of praying with and encouraging the starving Biafrans in the refugee camp that Kainene ran, had sex with young girls in exchange for food. He did not care about their health and vulnerability, instead used their desperate situation to his fulfill evil and selfish needs. Kainene painfully explained Father Marcel’s responsibility for a little girl called Urenwa’s pregnancy and several others to her twin sister, Olanna. She said: “Apparently I have been blind; she’s not the only one,”... “He fucks most of them before he gives them the crayfish that I slave to get here!” The enraged Kainene cried and not only wondered how it was possible to rape young, needy and starving girls, but also how Father Marcel would account for that to God. Father Jude, however, did not stop nor caution his colleague, Father Marcel from committing such heinous acts, prompting Kainene to send them both away (Adichie, 2006: 498-9). As a fellow woman, Kainene was empathetic, therefore acted by eliminating the perpetrators. This presentation of scarred bodies is a call for attention, da Silva argue that “...through confronting and graphic representations of what often are semi-ritualistic occasions of domestic violence, of rape and mutilation, the novels articulate an aesthetics of excess, that calls attention to the difficulty of speaking the unfinished business of nation-making in the post-colonial nation (2012, 456).

Ugwu’s lover, Eberechi, is offered as a gift to the Colonel-who considers her a deserved ‘good’- in exchange of her brother’s posting. She narrates her unpleasant sexual encounter with the Colonel to Ugwu: “He did it quickly and then told me to lie on top of him. He fell asleep and I wanted to move away and he woke up and told me to stay there. I could not sleep so the whole night I looked at the saliva coming down the side of his mouth...He helped us. He put my brother in essential services in the army” (Adichie, 2006: 369). The leader of Biafra, Colonel Ojukwu, found married women whenever he wanted by sending their husbands to prison on account of being saboteurs. This was ironic because the women who were supposed to be protected by the soldiers were the same women being sexually abused by both their Biafran leaders and soldiers.

The two white journalists who accompanied Richard to Biafra also had a strong impression of the Biafran women as sexual objects. One of them advised the other journalist and Richard: “I hear there’s a lot of free sex here. But the girls have some kind of sexually transmitted disease? The Bonny disease? You guys have to be careful so you don’t take anything back home” (Adichie, 2006: 463). This advice portrayed that apart from gathering information and stories for their respective newspapers about the ongoing war in Biafra, they anticipated free sex from the vulnerable girls.

In this regard, I agree with da Silva’s reading of the sexual exploitation of women in Biafra as a reflection of the ailing state of Nigeria during the Biafran war, and that each individual’s vulnerability related to the wider social and political havoc that took place in the country. He states:

I read the repeated acts of violence on the body of the individual in Adichie’s writing as metaphor for a broader concern with the body of the nation, itself ‘tragically atrophied’ (Adesanmi 2002, p. 122) by misguided nationalist discourses. The bruising of human flesh, especially pronounced in the first novel [Adichie’s Purple Hibiscus], hints to the hidden layers of bruising that underpin the Nigerian national fabric symbolised by the Biafran conflict detailed so overtly in the second novel [Adichie’s Half Of A Yellow Sun]. The evocation of enduring trauma is seen in Half a Yellow Sun in the reference to a mother’s attachment to the severed head of her girl child (p. 149), but also the exploration of rape as an experience damaging to both victim and perpetrator. Both novels pose or ponder the role of writing and representation in the processes of healing the national body (2012, 458).

The woman as a ‘mother of the nation’

During the war, the duty of feeding the family was left for the women who would line up at refugee camps, shoving and pushing to secure food for their husbands and children at home, despite being flogged by the militia members who tried to create order within the ‘...swift scrambling rush of the crowd’ that surprised Olanna (Adichie, 2006: 316). Kandiyoti states that:

Women bear the burden of being ‘mothers of the nation’ (a duty that gets ideologically defined to suit official priorities), as well as being those who produce the boundaries of ethnic/national groups, who transmit the culture and who are privileged signifiers of national difference. The demands of the ‘nation’ may thus appear just as constraining as the tyranny of more primordial loyalties to lineage, tribe or kin, the difference being that such demands are enforced by the state and its legal administrative apparatus rather than by individual patriarchs’ (1993, 377). The nation, Biafra in this case, demanded that the woman stay at home to feed and take care of the...
children, and to go get food for the family from the refugee camps while the men went to war to liberate Biafra from the Nigerian soldiers. Adichie describes the conscription of able bodied boys and men by the Biafran soldiers. Ugwu, Odenigbo's houseboy, was among the young men who were conscripted, taken to the training camp for rigorous training in preparation for impending attacks. Odenigbo, after the death of his mother, felt the need to join the army, but Olanna was skeptical about it, for she feared for his death. The men who deserted the army, however, were not tolerated by the women who struggled to feed them. Mama Oji kept taunting her husband for running away from the army, called him a "castrated sheep": “You castrated sheep! You call yourself a man, and yet you deserted the army!...Just open that dirty mouth one more time, and I will go and call the soldiers and show them where you have been hiding!”(Adichie, 2006: 411).

When Chiamaka, Olanna's adopted child suffered from Kwashiorkor and lack of appetite, it was Olanna's duty as a mother to go to the relief food center and scramble her way to the front to get some egg-yolk for her (Adichie, 2006: 337). On one occasion, a group of Biafran soldiers snatched a tin of corned beef from Olanna on her way home from the relief center and she cried, for she considered the tin as food for her family back home, only for soldiers, who should have sympathized with her, to snatch it (Adichie, 2006: 342). Mrs. Muokelu, Olanna and many other women crowded the relief centers, and when they were informed of the hijacking of lorries carrying the relief foods, they became so desperate and disturbed, for their families back home were waiting and relying upon their arrival with some food to eat. Some mothers sold local goods like pepper and salt, with children tied on their backs. They had to be on alert so that when vandals attacked, they would run for their lives and that of their children on their backs. During these times, they cried with their children (Adichie, 2006: 363).

Lazy women were not entertained during the war. Adanna’s mother, for example had the habit of begging other women for food whenever they cooked in their shared kitchen, but Mama Oji discouraged the other women from helping her because of her laziness: “Stop giving her your food!” Mama Oji screamed. “This is what she does with every new tenant. She should go and farm cassava and feed her family and stop disturbing people!...”(Adichie, 2006: 411).

As the Biafran women slept on bamboo beds, some of the floors, washed peeled cassava tubers in filthy water (because it was what was available) with babies having wrinkled faces on their backs, nursing their infant babies on drooping breasts (Adichie, 2006: 363), their families were their priorities as the society dictated. That was what it took to be a ‘Mother of the Nation’ during the Biafra War.

Olanna’s Life Struggles Versus The Political Strife Of Postcolonial Nigeria

Olanna (a major character in Half Of A Yellow Sun) plays a significant role in the portrayal of the African woman’s woes in postcolonial Nigeria. Her life is paralleled with the political strife of postcolonial Nigeria, therefore showing how directly affected the Nigerian woman was by the politics in the country. She is a properly schooled woman, who holds a Masters degree in Sociology from the United Kingdom. She comes from a bourgeoisie family in Nigeria, whose source of wealth she questioned. When she found her mother shouting at an elderly worker, who was kneeling and begging for forgiveness for stealing four cups of rice, Olanna told Odenigbo (her lover): “My father and his politician friends steal money with their contracts, but nobody makes them kneel to beg for forgiveness. And they build houses with their stolen money and rent them out to people like this man and charge inflated rents then make it impossible to buy food” (Adichie, 2006: 276). Her concerns towards the poor in the society are in line with Fanon’s explanation regarding the bourgeoisie in developing countries, who take advantage of the poor: ‘What creates a bourgeoisie is not the bourgeois spirit, nor its taste or manners, nor even its aspirations. The bourgeoisie is above all the direct product of precise economic conditions’ (1980, 143).

This economic rift between the poor and the rich in Nigeria placed the poor people in postcolonial Nigeria in the category of ‘The Other’, and left them in a worse situation than they were during colonization, a concern that Fanon expresses thus:

Before Independence, the leader generally embodies the aspirations of the people for independence, political liberty and national dignity. But as soon as independence is declared, far from embodying in concrete form the needs of the people in what touches bread, land and the restoration of the country to the sacred hands of the people, the leader will reveal his inner purpose: to become the general president of that company of profiteers impatient for their returns which constitutes the national bourgeoisie (1980, 133).

Olanna and her family resided in Lagos, the heart of Nigeria, where most politicians and successful businessmen lived. She and her twin sister, Kainene, attended the high profile parties and dinners organized by their parents, who introduced her to rich businessmen, expecting her to get one of them for a husband. However, she declined her parents’ efforts and stuck to her lecturer lover, Odenigbo, with whom she moved in in Nsukka, to work at Nsukka University as a lecturer of Sociology. At
that point, she felt as though she had gained her independence, hence freedom to make personal decisions for herself.

Nigeria, as a country, around the same time in the early sixties, had also gained its independence from the British Colonizers, and every Nigerian was excited, but this happiness did not last long as there was the first coup. Major General Ironsi, an Igbo man overthrew the Central and Regional Government and killed the Prime Minister, which was the beginning of turmoil in Nigeria. The Igbo men, who were given top positions, were slain and beaten, and after six months, there was a military coup by the Yoruba soldiers, led by Major General Gowon, who sent all the Igbo people out of Lagos and back to the East. The Igbo people then formed their nation called Biafra, under the leadership of Colonel Ojukwu, that had its own flag and currency, but it took sometime before it was recognized until Tanzania (which was the first nation to, in the late sixties) did and it brought a lot of hope and joy to the Biafrans (Adichie, 371). The Biafran flag’s colors had meaning attached to them: ‘Red was the blood of the siblings massacred in the North, black was for mourning them, green was for the prosperity Biafra would have, and...the half of a yellow sun stood for the glorious future’ (Adichie, 2006: 352).

Olanna’s happiness did not last long either, for Odenigbo’s mother called her ‘a witch’, and declined to endorse Olanna’s union with Odenigbo based on her childlessness. She not only insulted Olanna, but also brought a girl from the village to replace Olanna as Odenigbo’s wife. Odenigbo consoled Olanna, and tried to make her understand that his mother was a village woman: “Nkem, my mother’s entire life is in Abba. Do you know what a small bush village that is? Of course she will feel threatened by an educated woman living with her son. Of course you have to be a witch. That is the only way she can understand it. The real tragedy of our postcolonial world is not that the majority of people had no say in whether or not they wanted this new world; rather, it is that the majority have not been given the tools to negotiate this new world’”(Adichie, 2006: 129). Odenigbo’s mother felt belittled by Olanna’s education, she felt that Olanna had already elevated herself to the status of a ‘man’, hence unfit to live with her son, for she would rule over him. Mama’s ego had collapsed, as a result of colonisation, for it was the white man who brought formal education to Nigeria, the same formal education that made women who acquired it be ‘disrespectful and tough-headed’, according to her. Olanna and Mama were from two different cultures, and in this case Mama felt superior over Olanna because she was the mother of the man Olanna wanted to get married to. Olanna was therefore ‘the Other’, and both she and Mama suffered collapsed egos. Olanna felt unwanted while Mama felt intimidated by Olanna’s academic achievements. However, Mama had to change her mindset, to get decolonized from patriarchy in order to accept Olanna as she was.

Biafra, on the other hand, during this warring period was considered ‘the Other’ by the rest of the Nigerians. The Biafrans were barred from accessing other cities for businesses, their accounts were frozen and they could not travel out of Biafra. Any Biafran who was still alive in Nigeria was killed, the main airport was raided and there was a massacre of all the Biafrans getting in Nigeria, and those who were working at the airport. Any plane transporting food to Biafra was shot down thus food was transported at night in darkness. The surviving Biafrans in Nigeria fled to Biafra in search of safety.

Olanna was deeply traumatized by the brutal killings of pregnant women during Biafran war that she could not walk when she went back home from visiting her aunty Ifeka, and her pregnant cousin Arize, only to find them dead and their bodies ripped apart. Her menstrual periods also lost color and became sparse, a change that could be linked symbolically to the actual miserable state of Biafra as a nation at that time. Olanna and her adopted child’s (Chiamaka) bodily changes and what she witnessed were equally juxtaposed with the suffering of the Biafran nation. When in the train, she witnessed a mother carrying her child’s head (Adichie, 2006: 399), an act that showed mother to child attachment and trauma in equal measure. Chiamaka also developed kwashiorkor, ringworms and her hair was infested by lice (Adichie, 2006: 425), things which wouldn’t have happened to her if their bourgeoisie life had not been disrupted by war.

Despite all the efforts of Odenigbo’s mother to separate him and Olanna, the two remained inseparable until an intruder, a village girl called Amala, was brought into the scene. Mama used black magic to make Odenigbo impregnate Amala, a situation that forced Olanna to leave Odenigbo’s house for her own. However, her aunt, Ifeka encouraged her to take charge of her life, because her life belonged to her alone, not a man (Adichie, 2006: 283). She ended up sleeping with another man (Richard) to get even with Odenigbo, an act through which she discovered her self-worth. When she finally forgave and reconciled with Odenigbo, their love intensified, quite the reverse of what was expected. In this regard, I concur with Plaias’ observation that ‘Her betrayal in exchange, comes therefore as a leveling act that fills her “with a sense of well-being, with something close to grace”... Moreover, Olanna excuses Odenigbo’s betrayal and transforms it into the basis for increased intimacy instead of disruption, reversing therefore the patriarchy’s dynamic. Instead of considering herself the victim of Odenigbo’s unfaithfulness, she pinpoints the real victim in Amala, “who did not have a voice”... and who “was so helpless” (2013, 78).

General Ojukwu, the leader of Biafra, brought in mercenaries to help in the fight against Nigeria. The Biafran soldiers were made to believe that if the sun on their flag refused to rise to a full sun, they would make it fall.
rise, and make Biafra stand on its feet (Adichie, 2006: 219). They set up troupes at specific points, and conscripted young Igbo men to fight for secession from Nigeria, but Nigeria was relentless, and fought back harder than before, after realizing that they had underestimated the strength of Biafra. Olanna, having underestimated Mama’s power over Odenigbo’s emotions, had not expected her to win in making Odenigbo sleep with Amala, but just like Nigeria, she accepted the prevailing situation, got back on her feet, forgave Odenigbo and when Amala’s baby was born, she decided to take care of her, despite warnings from Mama. Olanna doubled her efforts to save her relationship with Odenigbo.

After three years of war, millions of Igbos were killed and almost the whole of Biafra was recaptured by Nigeria. General Ojukwu fled Biafra as it surrendered to Nigeria once more. Mama, after seeing Olanna’s kindness as a mother to Odenigbo’s child, changed her attitude towards Olanna and accepted her as a daughter in law, before she got killed during a raid in her village. Olanna and Odenigbo finally got married, and went back to their previous house in Nsukka, at the end of the war. She acquired her identity as Odenigbo’s wife amidst the war, just like Nigeria recaptured Biafra through war and plenty of bloodshed, as part of its territory and continued to live as one country once again as she was when she acquired Independence from the British.

CONCLUSION

My discussion focused on the African woman as portrayed in Nigeria, through Adichie’s Half Of A Yellow Sun. The Nigerian woman in this postcolonial patriarchal political setting experienced double colonization, the first time by the British colonialists, and the second time by the Nigerian man in postcolonial Nigeria. The African woman has been presented as having been colonized in the mind, and therefore having embraced patriarchy, hence having placed the African man on a pedestal, a position socially higher than hers. Adichie in Half Of A Yellow Sun tells the story of the well-educated Nigerian woman as being viewed as a disgrace to society by her fellow, uneducated women. Odenigbo’s mother called ‘Mama’ disliked Olanna because of her barrenness, blaming it on her level of education for she had a Masters’ degree, Odenigbo married an unschooled woman or one who only had basic education so that she could always take her place as second to Odenigbo. This construction of the African woman, in my view serves as an eye-opener for the African woman, whose mindset has been colonized by patriarchy, to decolonize it and embark on supporting the progress of fellow women physically, mentally and academically. The African woman has also been portrayed as the man’s commodity. Olanna’s father offers her to wealthy businessmen in exchange for business deals. Olanna’s mother blindly supports her husband, and even attempts to convince Olanna to sleep with these men to gain favors for her father. The African woman was presented as determined and hopeful for a brighter and better future. Olanna was hopeful of a better future for her as a woman, and for the return of her sister Kainene, who by the end of the novel, had not returned home from Lagos where she had gone to look for food. As Olanna, Ukwu, Richard, Odenigbo and Baby Chiamaka started their lives afresh at the end of Biafra, Olanna was grateful for having spent happy moments with her twin sister, Kainene before she left. Olanna lived with the hope that her sister would soon join them in the peaceful Nigeria after the three year long war, and that the Nigerian woman would finally be embraced as a strong and productive member of the society. To add on her efforts of fighting for the freedom of the African Woman in postcolonial patriarchal Africa, Adichie, also incorporated the support of the males towards this course. Adichie gives a passionate sexual experience between Olanna and her lover, Odenigbo. Whenever Olanna was distressed, she always found her comfort through a sexual encounter with Odenigbo. When Odenigbo’s mother died during the Biafra war, he resorted to drinking to relieve himself of stress hence could not have sex with Olanna under those circumstances, which left Olanna downhearted for she needed his comfort to endure the difficult times of the war: ‘She kissed his neck, his ear, in the way that always made him pull her close on the nights that Ugwu slept out on the veranda. But he shrugged her hand off and said, “I’m tired, nkem.” She had never heard him say that before. He smelled of old sweat, and she felt a sudden piercing longing for that Old Spice left behind in Nsukka’ (Adichie, 2006: 417). When Olanna’s legs went numb after she saw the mutilated body of her pregnant cousin Arize, Odenigbo was by her side, giving her the hope of a better future, he had sex with her whenever she wanted: “Touch me.” She knew he didn’t want to, that he touched her breasts because he would do whatever she wanted, whatever would make her better’ (Adichie, 2006: 201). Later, Olanna regained her strength and could walk again. These two instances clearly show the huge impact Odenigbo had on Olanna’s wellbeing. This is a call to the members of the Nigerian society, and patriarchal Africa at large to rescue the African woman from subordination. The problem of patriarchy and domination of African women by the African men can be solved by the men resorting to treating women as their counterparts, and not as second class citizens, both in the domestic and formal set up. The already mentally colonized women should also decolonize their mindsets, and support the twenty first century African woman in her struggle to gain freedom because a free African woman is commensurate with a more productive African society required, for she will perfectly fill the gap currently experienced in African
leadership, dominated by African men that predisposes the African continent to a retrogressive state.

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